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INSANITY AND THE NATION.

BY H. ADDINGTON BRUCE.

Nor long ago the United States Census Bureau issued a report which should have provoked instant and wide-spread discussion. Of all the publications giving the results of the twelfth census, there is hardly any of such importance to the American people. For in language the most explicit, and supported by statistics gathered with the scrupulous care that has characterized all the enumerations of the latest census, it reveals the existence of conditions making strongly against the continued prosperity of the United States and its continued progress to headship among the nations.

The reference is to the special report on "Insane and Feeble-minded in Hospitals and Institutions." At first glance, nothing alarming is to be seen in the statement that in 1903 there were in the insane asylums of the country a total of 150,151 inmates. What is this, it may be asked, in a population exceeding 80,000,000? But the matter quickly assumes another aspect when it is observed that in 1890, the year of the preceding census, the insane asylums held only 74,028 unfortunates; and that, ten years earlier, the asylum population was but 40,492. In other words, there has been a progressively more rapid increase in insanity than in population.

Just what the difference is, it is impossible to say. Statistically, it is enormous. Thus, from 1880 to 1890, while the total population increased by about 25 per cent., the asylum population increased by 85 per cent., and from 1890 to 1903 by more than 100 per cent. as against an increase of less than 30 per cent. in the total population. These ratios, it must be said, do not afford an exact measure for the increase in insanity. For one thing, the more humane methods of treatment now in vogue are

of themselves sufficient to induce an increase in the asylum population.* Friends of the insane, having lost much of the old-time prejudice against asylums, now send the afflicted to institutions instead of keeping them secluded, as was formerly an extensive practice. Formerly, too, the asylum population was largely confined to acute cases, which is very far from being the fact to-day. Again, the patients, being treated better, live longer. Whence in no small measure is attributable the increased provision for the insane. The census of 1890 had to do with only 162 asylums; that of 1903 with 328.

Here, curiously enough, is another gain of more than 100 per cent. As a matter of fact, making all possible allowance for factors tending to exaggerate the actual increase in insanity, there is reason to believe that it is increasing almost as rapidly as the figures above quoted would indicate. It must be remembered that the asylum population does not represent the total insane population. The census of 1890 found no fewer than 32,457 insane who were not inmates of asylums. The census of 1903 made no attempt to enumerate the non-asylum insane, the officials believing that any such attempt was foredoomed to failure for the reason that "the term 'insane' is necessarily vague unless applied to persons whose insanity has been established by experts, since the character or degree of mental unsoundness which constitutes insanity cannot be accurately determined by the layman." It is, therefore, most significant to discover that in 1903 the asylum insane, taken by themselves, outnumbered the asylum and non-asylum insane of 1890 by 43,666. As the census officials suggest, the non-asylum insane of 1903 must have been at least as numerous as the non-asylum insane of 1890—that is to say, must have been from 30,000 to 35,000 units. Which would

* It must be conceded that there still is wide room for improvement in the treatment of the insane. Impressive proof of this is contained in a forthcoming book, advance sheets of which I have been enabled to examine through the kindness of Professor William James. It is the work of a man who became mentally disordered and was confined for two years in sundry private and public institutions in Connecticut. Now, with his reason restored, he has written a detailed account of the treatment he then endured; in a sober, rational, and temperate way making revelations that cannot fail to appeal powerfully and persuasively to the public conscience. His book is one of the most remarkable human documents I have ever seen, and what makes it the more valuable is the fact that it proposes a practicable, constructive programme of reform, looking not only to improvements in asylum methods but to the adoption of measures tending to check the growth of insanity in the United States.

bring the total insane population of the United States in 1903 well up to the 200,000 mark.

It may readily be conceded that in point of proportion to population the United States is better off than several other countries. In 1903 the ratio of asylum insane in the United States was 186.2 per 100,000 of population, as against 490.9 in Ireland, 363.7 in Scotland, 340.1 in England and Wales, 238.6 in Canada, 224.2 in Switzerland, and 191.6 in Germany. Small comfort, though, is to be derived from this, and less comfort in view of the circumstance that the statistics indicate a tendency on the part of the United States to outstrip even the countries named in the production of lunatics. Some sixty years ago, according to the best figures available, England, Scotland, and Ireland had between them a total of about 25,000 insane; now they have some 160,000, or more than a fivefold increase in six decades. But in the same period the total of insane in the United States has leaped from the neighborhood of 20,000 to at least 180,000, or a ninefold increase. Even allowing for the more rapid increase in the growth of the population of the United States, as compared with the growth of the population of the United Kingdom, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that conditions of life in the United States are peculiarly provocative of insanity.

This conclusion, be it noted, is suggested by the census officials themselves attacking the problem from another standpoint. Their statistical survey of the asylum population showed that of the 140,312 white insane in asylums on December 31st, 1903, 90,297 were natives of the United States, 47,078 were foreign born, and 2,937 were of unknown nativity. This meant that, relatively, the insane were more numerous among the foreign-born whites than among the native born. But, pursuing the subject further and endeavoring to ascertain just what quotas the several nations contributed to the insane population of this country, the investigators made some singular discoveries. They found that the Scandinavian peoples were second only to the Irish in supplying American asylums with inmates. Yet, in point of home insane, the Scandinavians were far more happily situated than the Scotch, English, Canadians, Swiss, Germans, French, or Dutch, to say nothing of the Irish. Again, an amazing "form reversal" was found in the case of the Germans and French, who outdistanced the English as contributors to American insane

asylums. Similarly with the Hungarians, whose native ratio was the lowest of all—a scant 14.1 per 100,000 of population—but who outranked the English, Canadians, and several other nationalities in the asylum statistics of the United States. These discrepancies seem to defy explanation. As the authors of the census report aver, they can hardly be due to the fact that some of the foreign nationalities are represented in the United States by the best of their stock and some by the worst. It is, moreover, significant that “insanity is apparently most prevalent in the nationalities who were among the earliest immigrants to this country and contributed the sturdiest of their people.” Taking one thing with another, therefore, the census investigators incline to the opinion that “it may be that an explanation of these discrepancies is that conditions of American life are conducive to an increase in insanity.”

What makes the prospect for the future more deplorable is the circumstance that an increase in insanity is necessarily accompanied by a still greater increase in those nervous and mental ills which, while they may not culminate in insanity, prevent the individual from fulfilling his whole duty to himself and to society, and thus act as a drain on the national body politic. Then, too, the dread factor of heredity intervenes. Lunatics and neurasthenics cannot beget sound children, and already there are indications that neurasthenia, as well as insanity, has a firm foothold in every section of the country. Let not the reader deceive himself with the thought that this is a generalization incapable of positive proof. Statistical proof, to be sure, we cannot have, for it is impossible to enumerate our neurasthenics as we enumerate our lunatics. But the statement finds its vindication in the life of every American city, town, and hamlet—in the life, even, of the most remote farmhouse. Who among those chancing to read these lines fails to number among his acquaintances some of unstable temperament, of flighty impulse, of unsound mind? On every street, at every corner, we meet the neurasthenics; we meet, too, the lunatics whose madness may perchance pass unrecognized until the morning paper tells its story of violence and sudden death.

It is futile to say, with many an eminent alienist, that this is the price that must be paid for civilization—futile, because a civilization that would sap the vitality of mankind could never

hope to prove an enduring fact. Nearer the mark is it to say that this is the price that must be paid for *lack of adaptation to the exigencies of civilization*. And thus we are brought to the *crux* of our argument—namely, that what is needed, in view of the portentous increase in nervous and mental disease throughout the civilized world, and in the United States in especial, is the application of some agency, some force, some principle that will enable the human organism successfully to withstand the added strain that has been put upon it by the demands of modern life. It is not a question of turning back the wheels of progress—it is a question of finding a way to make the wheels of progress run more smoothly.

The sooner our alienists, our neurologists—indeed, our general practitioners of medicine—appreciate this fact, the better for the individual and the race. The discovery that insanity and allied maladies are on the increase is no new thing. It has been remarked for generations, and many have been the radical suggestions looking to prevention. Some of these—as, for example, the prohibition of the marriage of persons with a family history of insanity or alcoholism—would undoubtedly prove more or less ameliorative. But the great defect in all is that they do not take into account the continuance of the *external* conditions making for mental instability—the multiplication of human activities, the growing complexity of the concerns and relations of every-day life—in a word, the increasing severity of the struggle for existence. Now, it is unreasonable to suppose that by legislative enactment or any other process it will be found possible to make the struggle for existence appreciably less severe. On the contrary, as the world grows older, more problems, greater complexities are certain to arise. To this the finger of history points unerringly. Consequently, the thing to do is to take conditions as we find them, admit that the individual must be subjected to an ever-increasing strain, and seek to fit him to carry the added burden.

Can this be done? It cannot if the human mind has reached its utmost development. But of late years certain facts, as yet little understood, have been accumulating to indicate the contrary. These facts, recorded sporadically from time immemorial, but misinterpreted and passing unheeded in the hurly-burly of the workaday world, point to the presence in the human organism

of faculties transcending those of which man avails himself in his commerce with his fellows. It is only within the past quarter of a century that any systematic attempt has been made to explore and correlate the phenomena indicating the existence of such hidden processes and powers; but already discoveries have been made of immediate practical benefit and prophetic of greater discoveries yet to come. For this the credit belongs to two groups of investigators—the “psychical researchers,” who, under the leadership of Henry Sidgwick and F. W. H. Myers, began in the early eighties to probe the marvels of the *seemingly supernormal* in human life, and the “psycho-pathologists,” who have devoted themselves to research into the *obviously abnormal* in human life. The credit belongs to both these groups; but for the purposes of our present inquiry it will be necessary to dwell only on the results attained by the psycho-pathologists.

For starting-point, these adventurers into the abnormal took the phenomena of the hypnotic trance. Whence, they asked themselves, came the power that enabled one man to “will” another into a state of unconsciousness; and that enabled that other, while still seemingly oblivious to all about him, to reply intelligently to questions and perform the most startling mental and physical feats, some of them quite impossible to him when in the normal, waking state? Whence, still more, the power that invested hypnosis with a therapeutic efficacy, assisting weary nature to recuperate, to conquer disease, to ward off death? Delving deeper, experimenting ceaselessly, the psycho-pathologist presently began to discern, though at first dimly, that the power lay not with the hypnotist but with the hypnotized—that the hypnotist was, in reality, merely an agent setting in motion some secret principle or faculty lodged within the inert form before him. Now came, for the first time, scientific recognition of the influence of “suggestion” in the realm of matter as well as in the realm of mind.

But how could suggestion suffice to effect all the varied phenomena of hypnotism—the feats of memory, the performance of post-hypnotic commands, the actual cure of disease? This question the psycho-pathologist has not as yet succeeded in answering to his entire satisfaction. In pressing for an answer, however, he has brought to light facts that promise ultimately to revolutionize our conception not only of the mind of man but

even of the nature of man. Already the psychical researcher, attacking the same problem from another vantage-point, has made bold to declare that the human self is a much more complex and unstable affair than is generally supposed—that, indeed, the self of which a man is normally conscious is but a self within a larger self, of which he becomes aware only in moments of inspiration, exaltation, or crisis. To this doctrine, with the supernatural implication commonly attaching to it, the psycho-pathologist will not yield a ready assent. But he, too, has been led to insist on the complexity and instability of the self, and, insisting on it, has devised ways and means of rendering the self, if not less complex, at any rate more stable.

Here, so far as concerns the problem of combating the growth of nervous and mental disease, is the point of supreme importance. For some years, though for very few, in Europe and America, and in the teeth of an opposition composed of the most diverse elements—conservatism, prejudice, superstition, and ignorance—the psycho-pathologist has been quietly making practical application of the theories he has evolved from the first basic discovery, or rather appreciation, of the influence of suggestion in the life of man. Of these theories, the most important are the theory of subconscious mental activity, the theory of “dissociation,” and the theory of “reassociation.” Briefly, the first postulates the existence of subsidiary streams of consciousness flowing unperceived beneath the main stream, the stream of waking thought and action; the second assumes that under some unusual stress—such as overwork, anxiety, profound emotion, a blow, or an illness—there may result such a psychical disturbance that the main stream of consciousness becomes dissociated—part, and in extreme cases all, of it degenerating into a subsidiary stream; the third affirms that through suggestion, scientifically applied, there is always hope of reassociating the main stream of consciousness and thus restoring the victim to perfect equilibrium, provided dissociation have not proceeded so far that cellular destruction has set in. The story of how these theories have been vindicated forms one of the most absorbing chapters in the annals of science, but it would require far too much space to tell it here. Enough to say that, now employing hypnotism, now employing a method known as hypnoidism, and now employing suggestion pure and simple, the psycho-pathologist has succeeded

in effecting most marvellous cures in a wide category of nervous and mental diseases. Lost "personalities" have been restored, deep-seated delusions have been uprooted, neurasthenics and hystericals have been remade into useful members of society."*

But, it may be objected, this is doing no more than may be done by "orthodox" methods to solve the problem in hand. Granted that, here and there, individuals are rescued by psychopathology from the asylum and from the grave, what guarantee have we that psycho-pathology can benefit the race, can infuse a richer vigor into the stock, enabling it to rise superior to the storm and stress of modern civilization? This guarantee we have—that quite apart from its curative achievements, and although still in its infancy, psycho-pathology has demonstrated its ability to draw from the remotest depths of the human consciousness some latent power, and apply this power in such a way as to strengthen the human mind, render it the more receptive, increase its capacities. For the psycho-pathologist does not deal only with hystericals and neurasthenics. His *clientèle* includes mankind in the large—mankind criminal, mankind weak, mankind ignorant, mankind weary. Already he has won his spurs in the domain of mental and moral education. He has taken defective children, and enlarged their powers to an unexpected degree; he has taken vicious boys and girls, and developed them into useful men and women; he has taken the victims of liquor and drugs, and saved them when all else had failed to save them. And always, it cannot be too strongly emphasized, regeneration has come from *within*, not from *without*. The power that strengthens and heals is a power resting not with the psycho-pathologist but with the unfortunates appealing to him for aid. His task is to evoke that power and so direct it that it will do the most good.

This fact it is—not to speak of the corroborative evidence borne by the discoveries of the psychical researchers—which inspires the hope that a way has at last been found to overcome the ravages of insanity and kindred ills. But the process of mental expan-

* For a detailed view of the theories of psycho-pathology and the results that have followed the application of these theories, the reader may advantageously consult the works of Pierre Janet, Boris Sidis and Morton Prince: particularly Janet's "The Mental State of Hystericals" and "The Major Symptoms of Hysteria," Sidis's "The Psychology of Suggestion" and "Multiple Personality" and Prince's "The Dissociation of a Personality."

sion and adaptation, so far as it affects the race, must necessarily be slow. The element of heredity will have to play its part in transmitting to future generations the more robust "characteristics" by which a sound reaction to the environment of civilization is to be secured. The immediate procedure, then, should be to take steps to afford heredity the largest possible field of influence. Which, manifestly, may be done by generous support of the efforts of psycho-pathology, and by educating the great general public to an understanding of what psycho-pathology means and does.

It is gratifying to observe that, few in number as the psycho-pathologists are to-day, they have already won recognition—albeit grudging—in many lands. Especially do they find encouragement in France and Germany. In the United States, on the contrary—and this is the more unfortunate, since nowhere, as we have learned from the census statistics, is there greater need of their services—they have scarcely made their presence felt. But there are hopeful signs. Certainly, no country is more alive—though in a blind, crude, haphazard way—to the potency of suggestion. Witness the phenomenal growth of the Christian Science movement, which has its root in suggestion, and is, in a sense, psycho-pathological. Far more encouraging, however, is the spectacle of one of the foremost of living psycho-pathologists, Professor Pierre Janet, of the College of France, delivering a course of lectures before the faculty and students of the Harvard Medical School. Here, in truth, is proof positive that the old barriers are breaking down, that the physicians of the country are at last awakening to the necessity of acquainting themselves with the principles of the new science. Psycho-pathology will not, as has been feared, degrade the practice of medicine. It will exalt it, giving the practitioner a surer grasp of his subject, truer methods of diagnosis, and wider means of cure. For which reason the first forward step should be the foundation of chairs of psycho-pathology in every medical college in the land. And after this—if possible, contemporaneously with it—the establishment, in the leading cities and towns, of psycho-pathological institutes and laboratories to which patients may resort for treatment, and at which lectures may be delivered instructing the public in methods of personal utilization of the energy hidden in the recesses of the subconscious.

All this, of course, will cost money, but it will be money well spent, spent to the making of better citizens, of a sturdier race, of a Greater America. It would be vain to hope that the ultimate result will be the utter eradication of nervous and mental disease. In point of fact, the psycho-pathologist confesses himself helpless in the presence of such a disease when the dissociation has proceeded from the functional to the organic stage—that is to say, involves cellular destruction—or when the disease is essentially organic in its nature, being the consequence of profound physiological disturbances. Thus it is with actual insanity. But what proportion of insanity is “actual” remains to be ascertained. Certainly, the psycho-pathologist has even now shown that much supposed insanity is really but a functional derangement and thus susceptible of cure. And, in any event, there is no reason to doubt that, once heredity has had opportunity to operate on a sufficient number of psycho-pathologically strengthened individuals, the racial power of resistance will become such that insanity, with minor mental ills, will markedly decrease.

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